

Relationships in the Army

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Outline

Thesis: The Army should allow officers and enlisted soldiers to have personal relationships.

I. History

- A. Background
- B. Policy Changes

II. Regulations and Laws

- A. DOD Policy
- B. Army Policy
- C. Other Services' Policies
 - 1. Air Force
 - 2. Navy
 - 3. Marines
 - 4. Coast Guard

III. Force Degradation

- A. Morale
- B. Readiness
- C. Duty Performance
- D. Other Services' Perspectives

IV. Proposed Solutions

- A. No Policy
- B. Forbid Completely
- C. Limited Intervention
- D. Contracts

V. Counterargument

VI. Conclusion

We fully support any measure that would allow relationships to exist between officers and enlisted personnel in today's Army. In basic terms, the Army defines professional relationships as those that contribute to the effective operation of the Army. Conversely, unprofessional relationships are those that detract from the authority of superiors or result in, or reasonably create the appearance of favoritism, misuse of office or position, or the abandonment of organizational goals for personal interests.

If a couple allow their acquaintance to interfere with their profession at arms, then we feel they are not exhibiting the true traits of a professional soldier and should be dealt with accordingly. The Army's interdiction of one's personal preference of intimacy is a clear violation of their human rights. Leaders must be counted on to use good judgment, experience, and discretion to draw the line between relationships that are "destructive" and those that are "constructive" (DA PAM 600-35, p. 1).

Personal relationships between officers and enlisted soldiers in the US Army have long been a topic of great discussion and sometimes contention. Some argue that allowing such relationships breaks down the moral fabric of the Army and contributes to a reduced level of readiness throughout the ranks. In 'Corporate America', Judy Olian, Dean of Penn State University's Smeal College of Business and a specialist in strategic human resources management, referred to a 1998 Society of Human Resource Management survey of more than 600 human resource professionals. She found that some feel that these relationships caused lowered productivity among parties to the romance or that the romance might create an air of unprofessionalism in the workplace.

In the summer of 1998, the Pentagon announced a new policy that ended the Army's long-standing policy of allowing officers to date and marry enlisted personnel. This is such a

policy that we have to abide by as soldiers, but we are totally against it. The new rules were part of an overhaul of U.S. military guidelines governing romantic relationships in the military, including dating, marriage, adultery, shared living accommodations, engaging in intimate or sexual relations, and business enterprises (AR 600-20, para 4-14, 4-16). Then Defense Secretary William Cohen, explained that the new policies on adultery will not change military law, known as the Uniform Code of Military Justice, but will clarify the circumstances under which adultery will be prosecuted.

The Army was the only service that allowed officers to date enlisted soldiers, as long as they were not in the same chain of command. The other branches never permitted dating between officers and enlisted personnel. This recent change for the Army has created a uniform policy for all the services to avoid confusion, since U.S. troops increasingly serve in "joint" operations that usually have a mix of military services.

After the policy was enacted, there was a "grandfather" clause that covered military marriages between officers and enlisted personnel and allowed them time to comply with the new rules. Marriages between officers and enlisted personnel had to take place prior to March 1, 2000. Existing personal relationships between officers and enlisted personnel that were allowed under previous Army policy were also exempt until that date.

The fact that is often not considered is that unprofessional relationships can occur either on or off duty and because of the new policy. Today's standards of conduct do not allow us to separate our civilian and military lives as easily as we could in the past. For example, personal relationships between members of the Army National Guard or Army Reserve are allowed when the relationship primarily exists due to a civilian association or acquaintance outside of the Army, unless the members are on active duty (for other than annual training) (AR 600-20, para

4-14, 4-16). The expectation of today's Army is that we are representatives of the Army for more than our duty days.

Senior leaders must abide by and enforce regulations and laws since they exist for the governance of the current fraternization policies. In examining each service's policy, one can easily detect that a common thread exists – personal relationships are strictly forbidden.

Everything we do in our armed forces is governed by regulation as a minimum standard. Each branch in the armed forces has individual rules but all share common standards with respect to relationships between officers, enlisted personnel, recruiters, and potential recruits. Those standards must be applied fairly or teamwork in the unit will break down. Any actual or perceived favoritism will erode unit morale.

Fraternization deals with any relationship between superiors and subordinates. Rules concerning fraternization date back to the Roman Army. They were set in place to help maintain good order, promote relationships of mutual respect, prevent adverse impact upon a junior's response to orders, and to preserve the integrity of the chain of command. Some forms of fraternization are considered acceptable. The problem arises when an officer or enlisted service member steps across a fine line and the relationship becomes too familiar.

In July 1998, Secretary of Defense William Cohen directed all of the Services to give a clear and readily understandable fraternization policy. After review, Defense Secretary stated: "the current separate policies were corrosive and that it was important for all Services to come together as we move toward to an increasingly joint environment". It was noted that the Army's policy required many changes while the Air Force and Navy required very little. The Marines required no change.

The revised policies were issued on 2 March 1999. The Secretary of Defense determined that all Services would, by policy, prohibit personal relationships such as dating and ones that compromise or appear to compromise the integrity of supervisory authority or the chain of command. It also prohibited the improper use of rank for personal gain, shared living accommodations, engaging in intimate or sexual relations, business enterprises, or commercial solicitations, and gambling and borrowing between officers and enlisted regardless of their service.

Some exceptions are: existing personal and business relationships between officer and enlisted that were authorized under previous Army policy are exempt until 1 March 2000 including existing marriages; landlord/tenant relationships; one time transactions (such as sale of automobile or house); and, for the Army and National Guard only, business relationship which exist due to their civilian occupation or employment.

The Army's fraternization policies are contained in Army Regulation 600-20. The National Guard follows the same Regulations as the Army's. The provisions apply to both Army personnel and personnel of other military services. This revised policy applies to different-gender relationships and same gender relationships, as well as the term "officer". It now includes commissioned and warrant officers.

The Air Force fraternization policy is contained in Air Force Instruction 36-2909, Professional and Unprofessional Relationships. While personal relationships between Air Force members are normally matters of individual choice and judgment, they become matters of official concern when they adversely affect or have the reasonable potential to adversely affect the Air Force by eroding morale, good order, discipline, and respect for authority or mission

accomplishment. The Air Force core values are integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do.

The Navy's policies are contained in OPNAV Instruction 5370.2B, Navy Fraternalization Policy. Personal relationships between officers and enlisted members that are unduly familiar and that do not respect differences in rank and grade are prohibited, and violate long-standing custom and tradition of the naval service. Navy has historically relied upon custom and tradition to define the bounds. Proper social interaction between officer and enlisted members has always been encouraged as it enhances unit morale and esprit de corps. Over 200 years of seagoing experience demonstrated that seniors must maintain thorough professionalism with juniors at all times.

The Marine Corps' policy is contained in Marine Corps Manual 1100.4. They use the term fraternization to describe improper personal and business relationships among Marines of different ranks or positions. Under the Marine Corps' policy, commanders are instructed to look at the facts and circumstances of each case.

The United States Coast Guard Fraternalization Policy is contained in Chapter 8 of the Coast Guard Personnel Manual, COMDTINST 1000.6A. The Coast Guard attracts and retains highly qualified people with commonly shared values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty. These values anchor cultural and service norms and serve as a common foundation for interpersonal relationships within the Coast Guard.

Fraternalization is a violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). It falls under a subparagraph of Article 134, and is defined by the Manual For Courts-martial (MCM). Officers or enlisted members who violate such orders are subject to action under this code (UCMJ). Referral of charges to a court-martial is not appropriate except in aggravated cases.

Responsibility rests with the leaders of an organization. Commanders should seek to prevent inappropriate or unprofessional relationships through proper training and leading by example. When an inappropriate relationship occurs, the commanders' response may include counseling, reprimanding, reassignment, demotion, removal from a promotion list, or other adverse action. Commanders must carefully consider all of the facts and circumstances in their disposition of such case.

Many feel that if these policies were not in existence, force degradation would become a significant second-order effect. Research has shown that in many cases, fraternization when properly monitored, actually builds teamwork, morale, and readiness while enhancing duty performance instead of degrading it.

Force degradation is a huge concern for all military branches. Disparity between branches on the definition of fraternization between commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers exists, just as differences in other aspects of the branches exist. For example, the housing of Air Force personnel far exceeds the level of housing of Army personnel; the physical training in the Marines is more intense than in any of the other services. Therefore, different policies are necessary. The differences in the branches are required to accomplish the missions of those branches; otherwise, there would be no need for the separate branches of service.

Similarities exist between the services, such as the need for high morale, readiness to defend the nation, duty performance in support of the service's mission, and many, but not all of the policies. Morale in the Army is very important to team building and esprit-de-corps. The Army depends on all its members to work together during times of war and peace. The Army actually encourages interaction between officers and enlisted soldiers, not only in the workplace,

but also off duty. A task force organized by former Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, and headed by Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Rudi de Leon, examined the policies and practices of maintaining good order and discipline across the volunteer forces. Mr. de Leon said in his memo, "Participation by members of all ranks in organizational activities, unit-sponsored events, sports, chapel activities, and community projects enhances morale, and contributes to unit cohesion" (Gilmore 1).

The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly discovered that privacy issues are a minefield in the legal sense, and that proving bedroom misconduct is a nightmare to enforce. The all-volunteer force experiences high risks to morale and lowered recruitment if the Army allows such a witch-hunt for sexual misconduct. Only when formal complaints force officials to investigate will the Army make bedroom issues its business (Wagner 1). Research indicates that a policy against officer and enlisted relationships is a detractor to morale and is a potential minefield to enforce, not to mention how it will affect the readiness of the military.

Readiness of a military unit is a critical part of the Army's concern when preparing for war. One of many considerations of readiness is the unit's strength another is available strength. If a unit is short on qualified personnel, or inherits a transferred enlisted soldier pending legal action because he or she is married or dating an officer, do you think that soldier is going to be ready for war? What about the unit the soldier was removed from? The previous unit has now declined in its overall strength and in its available strength. Both units will have difficulty performing their assigned mission during conflict. Morale in both units will suffer also. Retention rates are falling in the Army and recruitment efforts are high. With a policy disallowing personal relationships, the possibility of an Army witch-hunt, and the consequences

if suspected of such a relationship, many couples will decide to leave the military in favor of love over accusations of improprieties.

This is true for one couple, Paul Withun and Ann Bonney of the 501st Military Police Company. While serving in the same unit, this officer and non-commissioned soldier were not in each other's rating chain or chain of command. And even though they worked next to each other, their jobs required much joint planning, such as the unit's move from Wiesbaden, Germany to Ansbach, Germany. After the move, Withun and Bonney continued to live in Wiesbaden and commute to Ansbach for work. They shared rides, just as many others in the unit did, during which they talked about their lives and love. Because they were different gender, someone blew the whistle and caused tongues to wag with rumors. Bonney and Withun were moved to separate commands and given a 'No-Contact' order.

Faced with such a huge ethical and moral dilemma, Bonney researched the Army's new fraternization rule. It barred officers from dating soldiers but not from marrying them. They took leave, returned to their homes, and then met in Las Vegas where they were married. Upon returning to Germany, they informed their commands of the change in their marital status and instead of the Command dissolving the no-contact order, it continued it. Withun was court-martialed. He was found guilty of violating the no-contact order for the moments immediately preceding his marriage to Ann Bonney. He was reduced in rank from Master Sergeant to Staff Sergeant which will cost him \$700 a month in retirement pay for the rest of his life, and the federal conviction will prevent him from working in law enforcement as he planned. The trial judge, LTC Stephen Henley said he doubted the legality of a no-contact order between husband and wife. With Bonney facing charges, she resigned her commission and got out of the military.

The Army has now spent a huge amount of time and resources on this case, and the result is a lot of tension in the 501st MP Company, lessened morale in the unit, loss of a senior non-commissioned officer and the resignation of one of its West Point pedigreed officers (Liewer 1). Research indicates that the readiness of this unit was diminished through the weakened morale and the loss of two vital members of the team.

Duty performance is an individual responsibility. Duty performance can be enhanced by professionalism and by working as a team. Personal relationships in the day-to-day operations of an organization have to remain professional. The individuals have a lot at stake when they allow themselves to begin a relationship that has its roots at the office. Debbi Milner, President and CEO of Jade Systems Corporation, and co-owner with her husband John, says “business is business and personal is personal and this is a difficult line not to cross, but professionals are dedicated to the company and have a vested interest in its success. After all, they have put all their eggs in one basket”. Married couples working together can help in managing both their personal and professional lives. In the civilian sector, anti-nepotism rules seem to be going the way of rotary telephones and manual typewriters (Lynn 1).

Secretary of Defense Cohen directed all services to align their fraternization policies in July 1998. He said, “Breaches of good order and discipline in the all volunteer force are not widespread, but perceived and actual inconsistencies in policies and practices addressing those breaches must be remedied” (Gilmore 2). Task forces were formed and new policies were put in place. Army Regulations were updated to reflect the new policy. In spite of all of this, there are many married couples in the military today (AR 600-20). There were 500 couples that were grandfathered in. These marriages were ‘grandfathered’ and time was allowed for newer relationships to result in marriage or be ended.

There have been officers that have resigned their commission and returned to their prior enlisted ranks. There are reserve component members, which are exempt from this policy if their relationship was based primarily on civilian acquaintance, that have served on active duty either through accession to active duty or mobilization (Dickey 1). This policy change certainly affected the morale of the officers and enlisted soldiers in units. They were being rushed to make a decision; ultimately they had to choose between love and war.

Research does not indicate, and the commercial world does not believe that personal relationships are dangerous to success, morale, or unit cohesiveness. This is contrary to what former Secretary of Defense William Cohen believed in his attempt to align fraternization policies in the military. The services are different because they need to be different to support the United States of America during peacetime and during times of war. Like the many Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, the services each have their own purpose, their own vital role in the protection of our country.

As with any other issue of this magnitude in the Army, many proposed solutions come to our minds for potential exploration and implementation to allow personal relationships to exist. Several approaches may be taken by a leader in trying to figure out what is best for their workplace. One option is no policy; however, that obviously entails a risk of sexual harassment and other complaints. A second option is to swing the opposite way. That is, forbid any dating between any soldiers at any time. Although this policy appears on its face to solve the problem, it may not be realistic in an environment in which soldiers work long hours together and work becomes the major source of a social life - particularly for younger soldiers. The policy also encourages people to keep relationships a secret, which can lead to hidden problems. This

appears to be the approach that the U.S. Army took in an attempt to overhaul military guidelines governing romantic relationships.

Another option that appears to be the more popular, middle-of-the-road approach, calls for intervention only when the workplace romance is between a supervisor and a subordinate. That policy would require the supervisor to inform the superiors when he or she is involved in a relationship with a subordinate. Steps must then be taken to alter the chain of command so that the supervisor is no longer directing the work or evaluating someone with whom he or she is having a relationship. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, this approach may still disrupt the workplace, but it can limit morale-damaging complaints of favoritism and concerns about potential sexual harassment complaints.

The prudent leader, informed of the existence of a workplace romance, would discreetly, and in a non-intrusive way, check with the parties of the relationship to ensure that it continues to be voluntary and consensual. Because the targets of lawsuits often are supervisors, they especially should receive training on the potential explosiveness of dating co-workers (Hudson, 2000). However, a sexual harassment policy must remain in place to provide an outlet in case the relationship sours and the aggrieved party feels that harassment has become an issue.

Finally, some leaders looking to limit their liability may adopt what are known as love contracts in 'Corporate America', which require both parties to sign a contract acknowledging their consent to the relationship. Love contracts are useful in that they are evidence that the relationship between a supervisor and subordinate was welcome and voluntary (Hudson, 2000). In either of the aforementioned cases, ignoring the existence of a workplace romance may mean future problems for an organization.

As illustrated, there are numerous reasons that personal relationships should be allowed. However, those with opposing points of view suggest there are an equal number of reasons and examples why those relationships should not exist. Some feel that personal relationships and fraternization will always divide and destroy a unit, and therefore agree with the Department of Defense and Army policies that prohibit personal relationships and fraternization within the military. Professional relationships are personal interactions between all soldiers in the Army. They build unit morale, discipline, respect for authority, communication about duties, performance, and the unit's mission are always encouraged by the chain of command. Additionally, and again highly encouraged, participation in unit activities contributes to esprit de corps and team building. However, when these interactions cross the line into the personal relationship arena, they usually break down or destroy unit morale, discipline, and respect for authority.

The current fraternization policy dates back to 1978 when the Secretary of the Army approved a new policy that was incorporated into AR 600-20. With the increase of women joining the Army, a problem was created in relationships between male and female soldiers of different rank. The policy in 1978 stated that "such conduct is contrary to good discipline and morale and should be avoided". Commanders and supervisors were directed to counsel persons involved in such situations and take appropriate action to eliminate the problem (AR 600-20).

When then Secretary of Defense William Cohen implemented a new policy in 1998, the reason for this policy was clear, as previously mentioned. He further stated, "The actions I am directing strengthen the maintenance of good order and discipline that is essential in our military services". The policy adopted in 1998 clearly states the definition and policies regarding personal relationships in all four services. AR 600-20 states and specifically lists certain types of

personal relationships that are prohibited between officers and enlisted personnel. Unfortunately there are a number of cases that show soldiers, both officer and enlisted, not complying with this regulation and the consequences of what happened to both the soldiers and the unit.

Fraternalization illustrates a personal relationship between an officer and an enlisted member that violates the customary bonds of acceptable behavior (DOD 5500-7). One of the most famous of these violations occurred in the Air Force. One of the first female fighter pilots, a First Lieutenant, was charged with violating this policy. She was charged with fraternization, conduct unbecoming an officer, and violating a direct order. She subsequently resigned her commission and left the Air Force in disgrace under heavy media coverage.

Another violation occurred in 1999 when then Major General John J. Maher was found guilty of having improper relationships with the wives of two military subordinates, and attempted to engage in another unprofessional relationship with an enlisted soldier (AR News 1). MG Maher was reduced two grades and retired in the grade of Colonel. As a result of this punishment, Maher's retirement pay as a Colonel was \$1,406 less per month than it would have been had he retired as a Major General. Then Secretary of the Army, Louis Caldera, was quoted as saying, "The two-grade reduction from Major General to Colonel should send a very clear, strong signal that there is no place in the Army for this type of behavior" (AR News 2). These cases were very high profile, but did not show the damage caused to their units as a result of their actions.

Opposition feels that nothing destroys military effectiveness more quickly or effectively than division in the ranks (AR News 3). There is an absolute need to keep personal relationships outside of the Army and the workplace. An effective unit builds cohesion and sense of community within the organization. Therefore, trust is the key element needed from superiors to

subordinates. The success of mission depends in large measure on the degree of trust and understanding that exists among the people in our units (AR News 4). Unprofessional relationships detract from the authority of superiors and result in or create an appearance of favoritism and misuse of the position within an organization (Army Times 2).

This problem has gotten such wide spread media coverage that even civilian companies now have regulations regarding office romances. The law states that adult individuals should have the right to cohabit, to marry if they so wish, and there shall be no bars to marriage on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, or other conditions (Kurtz 1). Kurtz also states that “a person’s private life has no affect on their professional lives (Kurtz 2).” As such, skeptics continue to use the only excuse they can agree upon to go against standing policies. It makes the judgment of these relationships somewhat cloudy and continuously controversial.

It is difficult to predict which relationships—strong friendships, career, business—can create adverse effects. Many judgments are “after the fact” and are “in the eye of the professional”, since they judge the results of the relationships and not the relationships themselves (DA PAM 600-35, p. 4). Personal relationships between Army members are normally matters of individual choice and judgment. As it remains a soldier’s duty to uphold good order and discipline as a sworn member of the Armed Forces, personal relationships should become matters of official concern only when they adversely affect Army operations or good order and discipline.

All of us would agree, nonetheless, that we have a clear right to make certain personal decisions about our lives autonomously and free from the illegitimate influence of our employers (Shaw, 2004). Determining whether or not relationships adversely affect the Army and its mission is often not very clear. There are a lot of gray areas. One person might not see anything

wrong with the way two people interact with one another, while another person might perceive their relationship to be extremely unprofessional solely based on their ranks. Personal relationships between officers and enlisted soldiers have minimal, if any, negative effect on readiness, morale, duty performance, and the like as long as the relationship is strictly governed and not used in an advantageous manner. If such a relationship does not affect normal operations in the workplace, officials should not be allowed to invade soldiers' intimate privacy and dictate with whom that intimacy can be shared.

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